



RETIREE



TIMES

A publication of the
Vandenberg AFB
Retiree Activities
Office, 30 SW/CVR
747 Nebraska Ave.,
Suite A200,
Vandenberg AFB,
CA 93437
Phone :
(805) 606-5474

Fall 2003

Vandenberg AFB Calif.

Vol. 3 No. 4

2003 Retiree Appreciation Day Vandenberg Air Force Base

By 1st Lt. Richard Palmer USAF

30th Medical Group

Team Vandenberg would like to say "Thank You" to all the retirees and their family members for the many years of dedicated service they have given to our great nation and to acknowledge them as a vital part of our military family. In this light, Vandenberg Air Force Base is hosting the 2003 Retiree Appreciation Day at the Pacific Coast Club Nov. 15, 2003 and we would like to invite all retirees and their family members to participate in a fun filled day of information and camaraderie with fellow service members. Registration begins at 7:30 a.m. with the formal program beginning at 8:30 a.m.

The 30th Space Wing Commander's invitation letter will be mailed out in the very near future. The RSVP process has allowed the Pacific Coast Club to prepare enough food for all attendees in the past, and we would like to continue to assist them in anyway possible. We urge you to RSVP to the Retiree Activities Office as soon as possible by using the form from the lower right corner of this page, by phone at (805) 606-5474 or e-mail your RSVP to retirees.office@vandenberg.af.mil.



Photo by 30 SW

We anticipate several hundred individuals attending again this year. To prevent parking problems the club parking lot will be reserved for handicapped attendees and we ask that everyone else park at the parade grounds. We will have shuttle buses running from the parade grounds to the

Pacific Coast Club throughout the day to transport attendees back and forth.

Information tables will be set up and organizations will provide literature on various subjects relevant to retirees and their spouses. Experts will brief on a variety of topics from medical, dental, and financial

programs to the most updated legislative initiatives that are being employed.

The Pacific Coast Club offers a continental breakfast and a buffet style lunch for a very reasonable price. Those attending will be able to purchase meal tickets during registration. There is also a food court in the Base Exchange and Burger King, which are both within walking distance. The main dining room, which is located in the club itself is also available.

The commissary and base-exchange plan to have promotional items on sale during Retiree Appreciation Day, and people can visit the Joint Retiree Center, which opened three years ago on Appreciation Day. We'll also have airmen available to update military identification cards or vehicle registrations. See the Nov. 7 issue of *Space & Missile Times* for more information.

So, come on out and join us at the 2003 Vandenberg Retiree Appreciation Day Nov. 15. This event promises to be a valuable look into benefits and services along with an opportunity to see the future of America's fighting forces. We look forward to seeing you there!

Family Days

The 30th Space Wing will observe family days Friday, Nov. 28, the day after Thanksgiving; Friday, Dec. 26, the day after Christmas and Friday, Jan. 2, the day after New Year's Day. Most base facilities will be closed during these days in addition to being closed during the associated holidays and weekends. This includes the base clinic and pharmacy. The exchange and commissary are not affected by this closure.

The Military Personnel Flight Customer Service and the Pass and ID Section will be closed Tuesday, Dec. 9, 2003 for computer equipment changes.

RAD information

Please fill out the form below, or write the information on a piece of paper, and mail it to Retiree Activities Office, 30SW/CVR, 747 Nebraska Ave., Ste. A200, Vandenberg AFB, CA 93437-6261. As an alternative, call the RAO at (805) 606-5474 or e-mail the information to retirees.office@vandenberg.af.mil.

First Name	Last Name
Street Address or Box Number	
City, State, ZIP Code	
Counting yourself, how many in your party?	
Number for lunch at Pacific Coast Club?	
A minimal fee will be charged for lunch.	

PERMIT NO. 97
LOMPOC, CA
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
STANDARD
PRESORTED

Official Business
Vandenberg AFB, CA 93437-6261
747 Nebraska Ave. Suite A-200
30 SW/CVR
Retirees Activities Office

Retiree
Activities
Center

Building 10364, Base Exchange Area
Office Hours: Tuesday through Friday 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Closed Saturday, Sunday, Monday and Federal Holidays

Vandenberg's Retiree Activities Office -- Serving those who've honorably served their nation throughout the years.

Director's Corner

By CAPT. CYRIL BUEHLER,
SUPPLY CORPS, USN (Ret.)

Retiree Activities Office Director

Mark **Saturday, Nov. 15, 2003** on your calendar. That's the day set aside for Vandenberg Air Force Base's fourth annual Retiree Appreciation Day. Initial planning meetings indicate this RAD will be bigger and better than ever. And the best part is, it's on a Saturday making it more accessible for everyone.

Accessibility means it's open to more than the retired military member. It includes their spouses and widows and widowers. All base support activities will have information tables to answer questions and provide assistance where they can. There will be door prizes awarded throughout the day

Retiree Appreciation Day upcoming

with a grand prize at the end of the event.

On another subject, we receive many requests for assistance in recruiting new members for various retired military related organizations. We cannot provide access to our mailing lists due to the Privacy Act. However, we

can publish the name and contact point for your organization. If you would like to be included in a future newsletter, send us the name and purpose of the organization, member eligibility and point of contact and we will be happy to publish this information.

In the meantime, we hope to see you Nov. 15, 2003.



Cy Buehler

Solvang gate closed

The Solvang gate located on Hwy. 246 west of Lompoc will be closed until Jan. 19, 2004 while construction is completed on the 13th Street Bridge. —S&MT

New Breakers dining schedule

In order to accommodate students from the Air Education and Training Command, dining hours at the Breakers Dining Facility will be modified for about four months. Retirees and their dependents are welcome in accordance with the following schedule:

Mondays - Fridays

Breakfast 5 – 8 a.m.

Lunch 1 – 2 p.m.

Dinner 4:30 – 7 p.m.

Weekends, Holidays, Down Days

Brunch 6 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Dinner 4 – 6 p.m.

Note: Scheduled Down Days are Nov. 28 and Dec. 26, 2003 and Jan. 2, 2004

Mark your calendars!

Retiree Activities Center

There will be no **third Thursday** of month meeting in the Retiree Activities Center during October and November. Meetings will resume with a potluck luncheon Dec. 11 beginning at noon followed by a program at 1 p.m. The site is Building 10364 – Base Exchange area, across from the Home & Garden Shop where retirees, spouses and widows gather to hear guest speakers, socialize and enjoy cookies and coffee. The schedule is as follows:

***Nov. 15 -- Saturday** -- Retiree Appreciation Day, Pacific Coast Club

***Dec. 11-- Thursday** – Holiday Potluck Luncheon

*Denotes different date than third Thursday of the month and for Appreciation Day different location.

NOTE: Speakers are subject to change. Please check the *Space & Missile Times* for details as days come closer. Also, listen to KUHL Tuesdays at 8:20 a.m. for current news on events; and watch for flyers posted at the RAC.

Letter to the Editor

Thank you so very much for sending me the copies of the *Retiree Times*. I read every word and can't tell you what a help and how informative it is. I attended Retiree Appreciation Day for the first time last November and am looking forward to going again this year.

Thank you,
Kathryn Smith

RETIREE TIMES

Editorial Staff

Col. Frank Gallegos, USAF

Commander, 30th Space Wing

Col. Wayne E. Louis, USAF

Vice Commander, 30th Space Wing/RAO coordinator

Capt. Cy Buehler, Supply Corps, USN (Ret.)

Retiree Activities Office Director

Cmdr. Earl Gustafson, USN (Ret.)

Editor/Layout

Staff Sgt. Rebecca Danet, USAF

Technical Advisor

PHC John McGraw, USN (Ret.)

RAO Photographer

Master Sgt. Robert Eastwood, USAF (Ret.)

Retiree Activities Office Administration

The *Retiree Times* is published quarterly, Fall, Winter, Spring, and Summer, by Lompoc Record Publications, a private firm in no way connected with the U.S. Air Force, under exclusive written contract with the 30th Space Wing. This commercial enterprise Air Force newsletter is an authorized unofficial publication for members of the U.S. military services who are retired and their families and surviving spouses residing in the Vandenberg AFB catchment area. Contents of the *Retiree Times* are not necessarily the official views of the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense or the Department of the Air Force.

The appearance of advertising in the publication, including any inserts or supplements, does not constitute endorsement by the Department of Defense, the Department of the Air Force, or Lompoc Record Publications, of products or services advertised. Everything advertised in this publication shall be made available for purchase, use or patronage without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national

origin, marital status, physical handicap, political affiliation or any other non-merit factor of the purchaser, user or patron.

Non-advertisement content is compiled from various sources by the Vandenberg Retired Activities Office. Even though reasonable effort has been made to assure the accuracy of the contents, no guarantee of such accuracy is made nor should be assumed. Direct questions on the various topics to the agencies and phone numbers listed in the articles. All photographs, unless otherwise indicated are RAO or Air Force Photos.

Publication deadlines are the 15th of March, June, September and December. The Retiree Activities Office reserves the right to edit all submissions for style and space. Send submissions to 30SW/CVR, 747 Nebraska Ave., Suite A200, Vandenberg AFB, CA 93437-1461 or via facsimile to (805) 606-0437. The phone number is (805) 606-5474. Email may be addressed to retirees.office@vandenberg.af.mil.

HELP!

Retiree Times address corrections

The mailing list for this newsletter is maintained by the Retiree Activities Office based on input from the Defense Manpower Data Center and other sources as well as input directly from addressees. Please make any corrections necessary on the address label, or on a piece of paper and mail to the RAO. In the event the retiree is deceased, indicate date and given name of surviving spouse. We want to continue to send the newsletter to the widow/widower. The mailing address of the RAO is shown on page 1. You may also phone (805) 606-5474 or send e-mail to: retirees.office@vandenberg.af.mil.

TRICARE counseling available

TRICARE MANAGEMENT AGENCY — The Fiscal 2000 National Defense Authorization Act mandated the establishment of Beneficiary Counseling and Assistance Coordinator positions, full time at lead agent offices and collaterally at Military Treatment Facilities worldwide. BCACs are a Congressionally mandated initiative, implemented by the TRICARE Management Activity to improve customer service, satisfaction, enhance beneficiary education, and help reduce the volume of Congressional inquiries from beneficiaries.

Also, to assist TRICARE beneficiaries with resolving debt collection issues, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness has established a Debt Collection Assistance Officer Program at every lead agent office and at every MTF worldwide. BCACs will provide priority assistance when presented documentation verifying that collection action has been started or that negative information is reflected on beneficiaries' credit reports as a result of late or non-payment for medical or dental care received through TRICARE.

While assistance officers cannot provide legal advice or act as beneficiary advocates, they will take all measures necessary to ensure each case is thoroughly researched and that beneficiaries are provided with written findings and assistance in the minimum time possible. People who experience undue payment delay for any TRICARE claim that has not been presented to a debt collection agency, are entitled to assistance from BCACs to assist in preventing these issues from becoming debt collection concerns.

BCACs act as a preventive mechanism for trouble-shooting all TRICARE and Military Health System issues and concerns. The local BCAC contacts are:

Vandenberg

Bonnie Robles

Phone: (805) 606-7483

Fax: (805) 606-4785

bonnie.robles@vandenberg.af.mil

or

Judith Monroe (Alternate)

Phone: (805) 606-6785

Fax: (805) 606-4785

judith.monroe@vandenberg.af.mil

Port Hueneme

Nona White

Phone: (805) 982-6369

Fax: (805) 982-6526

huennew@hue10.med.navy.mil

or

Daniel L. Hilf

Phone: (805) 982-6323

Fax: (805) 982-6526

huemdlh@hue10.med.navy.mil

Long-term care enrollment continues

AIR FORCE PERSONNEL CENTER — Initial enrollment for long-term-care insurance has ended, but people may still apply for care. Eligible persons include military retirees and qualified family members, active-duty, selected Reserve and appropriated-fund civilian employees.

The federal program was authorized by Congress in September 2000 to help federal employees, including military, defray the rising costs of long-term care. This can include home care, nursing home care or assisted-living facilities for people no longer able to perform normal daily activities because of chronic mental or physical conditions.

The insurance does not have an annual open season like many other health-care programs. The initial open enrollment season was held during 2002 to introduce the program, and officials have not decided when there will be another open season.

More information on the insurance program and how to enroll is available online at www.ltcfed.com or by calling (800) 582-3337 or TDD (800) 843-3557. Offices are open 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern Time weekdays and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturdays.

DFAS electronic pay services improves with "myPay"

DEFENSE FINANCE AND ACCOUNTING SERVICE — As more members of the military retiree community, including retirees and annuitants, become more computer oriented, Defense Finance and Accounting Service officials are increasing emphasis on the "myPay" system.

DFAS's way of allowing customers to manage their pay account information easier and more surely than ever before is myPay. A secure Web site and a personal identification number make myPay secure and the system has been designed to be customer friendly.

Retired members and Survivors Benefit Plan annuitants will find that myPay is available via the Internet 24 hours a day and it will deliver the Retiree Account Statement or Annuitant Account Statement before print mail. Changes made on myPay are effective the current pay period and with myPay, users have the confidence of knowing their pay information is accurate because they're in charge.

Features of myPay for retirees and annuitants:

- View and print the Retiree or Annuitant Account Statement
- View and print tax statements
- Update bank account and fund transfer information
- Edit personal address information

Retirees can change federal and state tax withholdings while annuitants can change federal withholdings. Retirees can manage financial allotments and U.S. Savings Bonds.

To use myPay, retirees and annuitants must have a PIN. DFAS customers without a PIN may obtain one by accessing myPay and clicking on "New Pin" or by calling (877) 363-3677 and follow the prompts. A new random temporary PIN for the account will be mailed to the requestor's address of record. People should allow 10 business days for delivery. Access to myPay is available at <https://myPay.dfas.mil>.

Veterans Memorial Museum to open in San Luis Obispo

The Central Coast Veterans Memorial Museum will hold a grand opening Nov. 11 beginning at 1 p.m. The museum is located in the Veterans Memorial Building at 801 Grand Ave. in San Luis

Obispo. Retired Marine Corps Lt. Col. Stan Gustafson, president of the museum board of directors, invites interested parties to join in the event. For more information call at (805) 543-1763.

House passes Project SHAD vets coverage

VETERANS AFFAIRS — The House passed the Health Care for Veterans of Project 112 or Project SHAD Shipboard Hazard and Defense Act of 2003, authorizing veterans subjected to Project 112/Project SHAD to receive priority health care services at VA treatment facilities without having to prove that their illnesses are service connected. It was referred to the Senate Veterans Affairs committee Sept. 11.

Project SHAD was a Cold War-era program that tested chemical and biological agents on often unsuspecting U.S. military personnel. The program began in the early 1960s and continued throughout much of the Cold War in order to assess the effect of chemical and biological weapons on military assets under various environmental conditions. Most of these tests were conducted at sea, but some were land-based. Visit <http://www.va.gov/shad/> for more information.

VA Seeks former POWs

VETERANS AFFAIRS—The Department of Veterans Affairs asks former prisoners of war not currently using VA benefits to contact VA to find out if they may be eligible for disability compensation and other services.

More than 23,000 former prisoners of war already receive compensation from VA. This year, the department mailed information about benefits to another 4,700 known POWs not on its rolls. However, VA estimates there could be as many as 11,000 more POWs for whom it does not have an address.

The VA is asking former POWs not receiving benefits who did not receive a VA letter recently to call the department at (800) 827-1000. Veterans and all Americans who know of a former POW can help spread the word that benefits and services may be just a phone call away.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Anthony Principi, said VA has expanded policies to cover increasing numbers of former POWs as new illnesses have been found related to captivity. The administration currently is pressing to get even more compensation and medical care benefits for former POWs.

Nine out of ten former POWs are veterans of World

War II, and their service predates the use of Social Security numbers as a military "service number." That, coupled with the decades that have elapsed since their service, makes it difficult for VA to track down those who have not opened a file with VA in recent years.

The most recent expansion of VA benefits for former POWs was a July regulation that added cirrhosis of the liver to the list of diseases to which entitlement to disability compensation is presumed in former POWs. Similar policies making it easier for former POWs to obtain compensation have been enacted for POWs detained for 30 days or more who develop specific illnesses.

Former POWs have a special eligibility for enrollment in VA medical care and are exempt from making copayments for inpatient and outpatient medical care. They have the same copay rules as other veterans for medications and for extended care. Free dental treatment for any dental condition is available to former POWs held for more than 90 days. More information about VA services for former POWs is available at <http://www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/Benefits/POW/>.

ABMC launches WWII Monument Registry

AMERICAN BATTLE MEMORIAL COMMISSION—The National World War II Memorial will be the first national memorial dedicated to all who served during World War II. The memorial, which will be established by the American Battle Memorial Commission, will honor all military veterans of the war, the citizens on the home front, the nation at large, and the high moral purpose and idealism that motivated the nation's call to arms. It acknowledges the commitment and achievement of the entire nation.

The Second World War will be the only 20th century event commemorated on the Capitol Mall's central axis. President Bill Clinton signed Public Law 103-32 May 25, 1993, authorizing the ABMC to establish a World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C., or its surrounding area.

The memorial is funded primarily by private contributions. Na-

tional Chairman, Senator Bob Dole, a World War II veteran seriously wounded on the battlefield and twice decorated with the Bronze Star and Purple Heart, led the fund-raising campaign. Frederick W. Smith, chairman, president and chief executive officer of FedEx Corporation and a former U.S. Marine Corps officer, was co-chairman.

As part of the World War II Memorial project, the ABMC is launching a web-based WWII registry to collect names of those who served in the war or contributed to the war effort. The registry is accessible on the National World War II Memorial Web site, at www.wwiimemorial.com/ or by calling the toll free phone number at (800) 639-4992. Registration is free. Americans may honor members of the World War II generation by enrolling them in the registry. To search for currently enrolled honorees, or to enroll a

family member or friend, visit the Web site.

WWII veterans are encouraged to attend the dedication ceremony scheduled for May 29, 2004, Memorial Day weekend. The memorial will honor the 16 million who served in the armed forces of the U.S. during World War II, the more than 400,000 who died and the millions who supported the war effort from home.

The official dedication celebration will span four days and will include a WWII-themed reunion exhibition on the National Mall staged in partnership with the Smithsonian Institution's Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, a memorial service at the Washington National Cathedral and an entertainment salute to WWII veterans from military performing units. Other related activities in cultural venues throughout the city are expected.

Cold War certificates still available

ARMED FORCES RETIREE NEWS SERVICE—Service members, veterans and federal employees who served between Sept. 2, 1945 and Dec. 26, 1991 are still eligible for a Cold War Recognition Certificate, said officials of the U.S. Army Personnel Command.

In fiscal 1998, the Secretary of Defense approved awarding the certificate to personnel who served during the Cold War. Thus far, about one million people have responded out of the 22 million entitled to receive the certificate, officials said.

An application for the Cold War Recognition Certificate can be found on the Internet at <https://coldwar.army.mil>. The Web site informs applicants about the correct procedures and the required documentation to receive the certificate. It also includes a reminder that the minimum turn around time is six months. Application forms with instructions are also available at the Vandenberg Retiree Activities Office.

Applications will only be accepted by fax or mail, officials said. More information on the certificate can be found on PERSCOM's Cold War Web site or by calling customer service at (703) 325-5864.

Job fair sponsored

Competitive Edge Services has been providing free career transition services to the military community since 1997. In addition to Corporate Gray Online, it also hosts the Corporate Gray Job Fairs for the military community and distributes the Corporate Gray Series books—"From Army Green to Corporate Gray", "From Navy Blue to Corporate Gray", and "From Air Force Blue to Corporate Gray." Every active duty member receives a free copy of one of these publications before they separate or retire.

Corporate Gray Online offers state-of-the-art features that assist retired and former military job seekers and employers alike to find a match. Job seekers can

use job search agents to have the system automatically send job listings meeting their criteria to their email address. Employers can use resume search agents to have Corporate Gray Online automatically send them the resumes of candidates meeting their desired profile. Job seekers can use the site free.

A Corporate Gray Job Fair is scheduled Feb 19, 2004 in San Diego, CA at the Scottish Rite Center. For more information contact:

Competitive Edge Services, Inc.
P.O. Box 342
Fairfax Station, VA 22039
Phone: (703) 690-6381
Fax: (703) 690-1687
corporategray@hotmail.com

CRSC applicants should use certified mail

AIR FORCE PERSONNEL CENTER—Retired military members applying for the Combat Related Special Compensation are advised to send the application documents certified mail, return receipt requested. This provides proof the application has been received and eliminates the need for a phone call which only delays procedures.

Lack of medical documentation is still a problem area. Administrators must see documentation clearly

establishing the cause for the diagnosis. The only case where this is not required is the Department of Veterans Affairs presumption disabilities, like those caused by Agent Orange. However, the Office of Secretary of Defense also says the military departments are not bound by any presumption if there is documentary information that the disability is not combat-related.

Medicare reform

By Cmdr. Earl Gustafson USN (Ret.)

Retiree Times Editor

The House and Senate have under consideration H.R. 1 and S. 1, proposals to reform Medicare including enactment of a prescription drug benefit. There has been some concern expressed about the affect of the legislation on TRICARE Senior Pharmacy program and TRICARE For Life beneficiaries.

Dr. William Winkenwerder Jr., Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs, has responded to an inquiry regarding any possible affect the enactment will have on Medicare prescription drug benefits.

“Our review indicates while the TRICARE pharmacy program is not specifically mentioned as a ‘creditable prescription plan,’ the proposed Medicare prescription benefit would be in addition to current TRICARE pharmacy benefits, not in place of it,” Winkenwerder stated. “As the bill is currently drafted, Department of Defense Medicare-eligible beneficiaries retain their right to TRICARE pharmacy benefits, whether or not they enroll in the proposed Medicare prescription pharmacy program.”

According to legal counsel for DoD, the FY 2001 National Defense Authorization Act created statutory authority for uniformed services retirees and their dependents age 65 and older who are entitled to Medicare Parts A and B to receive the same retail and mail order pharmacy benefit available to retirees and dependents who are under age 65 and are not Medicare-eligible. This authority is independent of benefits under Medicare. TRICARE pharmacy benefits would not be replaced or modified by either of the pending House or Senate bills

Winkenwerder also noted that while participation is voluntary, eligible beneficiaries who don’t sign up for the benefit when it becomes available would be subject to a penalty should they enroll at a later date. *Compiled from Fleet Reserve Association news releases*

VA seeks expansion of benefits for former POWs

VETERANS AFFAIRS — President Bush has proposed legislation to Congress that would improve benefits for former prisoners of war by eliminating the current requirement in federal law that a former POW must be detained for at least 30 days in order to qualify for full POW benefits.

The Department of Veterans Affairs currently presumes that certain medical conditions in former POWs held at least 30 days are related to their captivity. Using this presumption, a veteran may obtain financial benefits without providing evidence directly linking a medical problem to captivity.

The VA proposal also would

improve dental care eligibility and exempt former POWs from current co-payments for medications for non-service connected conditions. Currently, some ex-POWs may be charged \$7 for drugs that treat conditions unrelated to their service.

The current presumptions in law recognize that military medical records do not cover periods of captivity, which make it difficult for a veteran to provide evidence of the conditions endured. VA pays tax-free disability compensation ranging from \$104 to \$2,193 monthly, depending on the degree of disability, with additional sums for dependents.

— Edited from VA Press Release

TRICARE FAST FACTS

All of the TRICARE programs provide coverage for medically necessary ambulance services from an accident site or home to a hospital, or between hospitals. This would include air ambulances when travel by ground ambulance is either not available/feasible or the distance is too great for the circumstances, or the move requires more rapid transport because of the patient’s condition, than ground transport can support. Ambulance transport that is for patient conveyance

such as to transport to patient appointments, etc., would not be covered.

Children under 10 can normally use either parent’s or guardian’s ID card, but must be enrolled in DEERS. After the age of 10, the child’s sponsor should obtain an ID card for the child. Children under 10 should also have an ID card of their own when in the custody of a parent who is not eligible for benefits.

Base tours restart

By Airman 1st Class Brian Franks

30th Space Wing Public Affairs

The Vandenberg AFB public tour program resumed Sept. 11, after it was stopped two years ago due to heightened security levels on base.

Col. Frank Gallegos, 30th Space Wing commander, proposed the date to restart the public tours to commemorate the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks.

The 30th Space Wing Public Affairs office plans to conduct the tours the second and fourth Wednesday of each month, security and mission permitting, said 2nd Lt. Jami Streeter, 30th SW tour coordinator. Tours consist of a bus ride through main base to the Heritage Museum and take about two hours to complete.

During the tour, participants learn about the history of Vandenberg all the way back to its beginning in 1941 when it was the U.S. Army’s Camp Cooke, Streeter said.

At the Heritage Museum, the curator gives a tour of the museum, which has mock-ups of missile silos, an old missile control station and decommissioned rocket engines, Streeter said. The curator also talks about the different systems that were used and are in operation at Vandenberg today.

The tour leaves the visitors center parking lot at 10 a.m. and returns around noon. Participants are encouraged to arrive 30 minutes prior to departure time. Reservations are required at least two weeks in advance and tourists need two forms of photo identification. No walk-ons are permitted. As a precaution, visitors’ bags will be searched.

Anyone over age 10 may participate in the tour, but a guardian must accompany all children.

For reservations, call the base public affairs office at (805) 606-3595.

Air Force Worldwide Locator

By Cmdr. Earl Gustafson USN (Ret.)

Retiree Times Editor

The AF Worldwide Locator handles official and unofficial requests to locate Air Force Personnel. Unofficial requests are requests other than those received from any government agency and the Department of Defense. The Worldwide Locator only has location information on individuals who are currently receiving compensation from the USAF. This includes active duty, Guard, Reserve, retired and civil service personnel. If the individual has separated from the AF, no information is available

All unofficial requests must be in writing and fees may be applicable. The request must state who is being looked for along with name, address and telephone number of the requestor. A request constitutes consent to release this information to the member. This information should be placed in an unsealed envelope with a return address, postage affixed and the individual’s name in the addressee portion of the envelope. It can then be mailed in another envelope to HQ AFPC/DPDXIDL, 550 C St. West Ste. 50, Randolph AFB, TX 78150-4752.

The following information is required to make a positive identification:

- Full name to include a middle initial
- Rank [officer/enlisted/GS]
- Social Security Number or Air Force serial number
- Date of birth or an Air Force duty history to include the place, month and year of assignments after June 1970 [No assignment information is available prior to June 1970]

A fee of \$3.50, per individual request, is required from anyone requesting addresses on military personnel. The Worldwide Locator also provides a “Statement or Verification of Service.” This applies to active duty AF personnel only. A fee of \$5.20, per individual written request is required. Checks or money orders must be made payable to DAO-DE Randolph AFB TX.

For information, call Customer Service at (210) 565-2660. Hours of operation are 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Central Time Monday through Friday except federal holidays. *Compiled from AF Worldwide Locator*

TRICARE awards contracts

TRICARE MANAGEMENT AGENCY—Three managed care support contracts, totaling an estimated \$6.4 billion have been awarded to Health Net Federal Services, Humana Military Healthcare Services and TriWest Healthcare Alliance Corp. These contractors will provide health care services to 8.7 million uniformed services beneficiaries and support to military hospitals and clinics in the United States.

The new contracts will replace the seven contracts covering the current 13 regions over the next 14 months and will be simpler for the government to administer. California is located in Regions 9 and 10 under the current contractor, Health Net Federal Services. During the transition period, beneficiaries will continue to file claims with their current TRICARE contractor.

Each contract includes at least a nine-month transition, plus five one-year option periods for health care delivery and support. TriWest Healthcare Alliance Corp. of Phoenix, Ariz. was awarded the \$2.1

billion contract for the TRICARE West region and will provide support and health care services in most of western U.S. including California, Alaska and Hawaii.

The contracts do not include the target health care costs for option periods two through five that will be negotiated prior to exercising each option. Health care costs for these three contracts, for option periods two through five, are estimated to range between \$19.5 billion to \$20.5 billion.

The transition began Sept. 1, 2003. The turnover of responsibility for services in the newly aligned TRICARE North, South and West regions will be phased in, starting with areas in the West region on June 1, 2004, and will be completed by November 2004.

More information is available from the DoD Worldwide TRICARE Information Center toll-free at (888)-363-5433 or (877)-363-6337. Calls are answered in English only.

VA to fill some prescriptions by non-VA physicians

VETERANS AFFAIRS—Under a new policy, some veterans waiting to see Department of Veterans Affairs physicians for the first time may be eligible to receive medications from VA mail-out pharmacies that are prescribed by private doctors.

To be eligible for the new benefit, veterans must meet all of the following conditions:

- * Have enrolled in VA health care before July 25, 2003, and
- * Requested their first primary care appointment with VA before July 25, 2003, and
- * Must have been waiting more than 30 days for their first appointment with a primary care physician on Sept. 22, 2003.

The VA filled the first prescriptions under the new program on Sept. 22. Eligible veterans were unable to get prescriptions filled before that date.

The period between announcement of the program and filling the first prescriptions was necessary to allow VA to identify and contact eligible veterans and to put new systems and procedures in place to deliver this benefit.

The policy is a short-term measure to assist veterans who were enrolled and waiting for the appointment before July 25, when details about the new benefit were published in the Federal Register. It does not apply to veterans who are put on the waiting list after July 24.

Veterans covered by the new rule, and their non-VA doctors, will receive information by mail from their nearest VA medical facility about filling prescriptions by mail. VA estimates that 200,000 veterans will be eligible for the benefit.

Coughing revisited

By Cmdr. Earl Gustafson USN (Ret.)

Retiree Times Editor

The Spring 2003 issue of the *Retiree Times* contained an article reporting that information had been circulating on the Internet and in widely distributed organizational newsletters regarding a technique for surviving a heart attack under the heading "How to Survive a Heart Attack When Alone." The premise was that, by coughing when the individual suspects he or she is going into cardiac arrest, blood is forced to the brain and consciousness maintained long enough to call for help.

The procedure was originally published by a Texas chapter of Mended Hearts, Inc., a heart attack victims' support group. Mended Hearts later repudiated the procedure and asked that further circulation of the article be stopped. Executive Director Darla Bonham of Mended Hearts reported that a representative of the American Heart Association told her that he would not recommend that the public use this method where there is no medical supervision.

A contradictory viewpoint is now being put forward. Emma Ross, writing for the Associated Press from Vienna, Austria on Sept. 2, 2003 said, "Dr. Tadeusz Petelenz, a researcher in Poland, said the technique, called cough CPR, forces blood to the brain while the heart is starting to fail and keeps patients conscious long enough to call for help. It may also rectify their heart rhythm, he told a meeting of the European Society of Cardiology.

"He recommended cough CPR be taught to the public, but other experts said while the concept is provocative, it needs more study... 'Since the onset of the loss of consciousness is very rapid, they usually don't have enough time to call for help,' said Petelenz, a professor at the Silesian Medical School in Katowice, Poland. 'However, if victims could maintain consciousness until circulation is restored or help arrives their chances of survival would greatly increase.'"

Ross goes on to say that Dr. Leo Bossaert, execu-

tive director of the European Resuscitation Council and a professor at the University Hospital in Antwerp, Belgium, said Petelenz's idea is not entirely new and that doctors sometimes ask heart disease patients undergoing angiograms to cough rhythmically and forcefully to get their circulation going and would probably not be harmful, but it is far too early to recommend people try it at home. The symptoms preceding an attack can be hard for people to recognize in the 30 seconds before they lose consciousness, he said.

Dr. Marten Rosenquist, professor of cardiology at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden, and an expert in heart beat abnormalities, said the concept is interesting but that Petelenz showed no evidence his patients actually had arrhythmias. However, many physicians are still unaware of the technique and others feel that people are not capable of recognizing the symptoms of imminent sudden cardiac arrest or of performing effective auto-resuscitative coughing.

According to the ESC Web site, researchers from the Department of Bioengineering at the University of Utah, led by Dr. Petelenz, have proved that this isn't the case. They identified 115 patients at high risk of SCA and taught them to recognize early warning signs of SCA [shortness of breath, sudden nausea, and sweating] and the resuscitative cough technique. Patients used resuscitative cough in 365 instances when they felt faint, and symptoms disappeared in 292 cases, and only 73 cases required further medical assistance. All survived to receive follow-up therapy, which included 45 pacemaker implantations, 55 heart surgeries and 15 pharmacological interventions.

This information is presented for information only and the *Retiree Times* takes no position regarding this procedure. As in all health-related issues, the best course of action is to take the advice of a medical professional. *Compiled from the European Society of Cardiology Web site and Associated Press reports*

USMC Birthday Ball

The Marine Corps Birthday Ball will be Nov. 10, 2003. It will be at the San Luis Obispo Embassy Suites Hotel in the Grand Ball Room from 6 to 11 pm. Cost per person is \$40 and includes dinner. Tickets may be purchased by mail. Send a check to Jim Hawkins, 340 Nightingale Ave., Paso Robles, CA 93446-4010. For more information, call (805) 226-8503. Space is limited, act soon as last year was a sell out!

Retiree bowling league forming



Surf Lanes is forming teams for a military retiree bowling league. The bowling facility is located next to the base exchange. All military retirees, surviving spouses and their family members are welcome. This a new

league slated for the middle of the week. League officers are needed to determine the day and time. Sign up now and enjoy a winter of bowling with other retirees and their families. For more information, inquire at the facility or call (805) 606-3209.

Shades of Green AFRC opening delayed

AMERICAN FORCES PRESS SERVICE — The refurbished Armed Forces Recreation Center Shades of Green at Disney World in Florida won't reopen until March 1, 2004 instead of the originally planned Dec. 15, 2003, date.

Unexpected construction delays caused officials to move the date back 76 days, according to Peter F. Isaacs, chief operating officer at the U.S. Army Community and Family Support Center. The Army serves as the executive agent, operating AFRCs for Department of Defense.

Shades of Green is in the process of notifying those who have reservations and offering them other options. Guests who already hold reservations are offered three options:

- Keep the same vacation dates for 2004 at the same room rates guaranteed in 2003
- Keep their vacation dates for 2003 at a comparable Disney Resort at the same room rates plus the applicable state tax of 11 percent
- Cancel the existing reservation and receive a full refund

The renovation and expansion project that began in April 2002 was driven by high demand that kept the original 288 rooms at or near 100 percent occupancy. The hotel is financially self-sufficient, and no taxpayer dollars are used in the operations or for the new construction. When it reopens, there will be 586 new or renovated rooms, 500 new covered park-

ing spaces and 7,500 square feet for special events.

The new room rate will be \$70 for E-1 through E-5. Other rates are computed on a sliding scale based on rank and range up to \$106. Poolside rooms are slightly higher. The AFRC is open to DoD identification card holders in all branches of military service: active duty and reserve components, DoD civilians, both military and civilian DoD retirees, and their families.

The best way to make a reservation is to use the Web site as the phones tend to be overloaded. For more information, access www.shadesofgreen.org or call toll free (888) 593-2242.

Lawn bowling club celebrates 25 years

By Cmdr. Earl Gustafson USN (Ret.)

Retiree Times Editor

Historians believe the Egyptians developed the fine art of lawn bowling. One of their pastimes was playing skittles, a game of nine pins, with round stones. The oldest bowling green used today is in Southampton, England. Records show that the green has been in operation since 1299 A.D. Sir Francis Drake was one of most famous lawn bowlers. He was playing bowls in the year 1588 at the time of the Spanish Armada.

However, lawn bowling is more than mere trivia. The aim of the game is to roll the bowl, which is weighted on one side making it curve, so that it comes close to the "jack" or target.

People can check out the ancient sport by observing lawn bowling in action at the Santa Maria Lawn Bowling Club, now in its 25th year. The Club

periodically holds demonstration or open house events for those wishing to learn more about lawn bowling. Events take place Tuesdays through Saturday beginning at 9:45 a.m.

The Club is located across the street from the Santa Maria Recreation Department, which sponsors the bowling club. It's alongside the Santa Maria Natural History Museum at 420 S. McClelland street, just south of the police buildings.

Membership activities include lawn bowling Tuesdays through Saturday, beginning at 9:45 a.m. More information is available by calling (805) 343-9096 from 9 a.m. to 12 noon Monday through Friday. People can also stop by the clubhouse at 420 South McClelland Street, Santa Maria. Call 349-9838, or the president, Jim Graham, at (805) 929-2466. Marilyn Dover Benson contributed to this article

Tickets, Tours, Cruises

Vandenberg Leisure Tours is in Building 10122, the Services Center, located near the corner of California Boulevard and Washington Avenue. It offers a wide variety of excursions to suit every taste. In addition, the tour office lists favorable rates at hotels and motels in the vicinity of Southern California theme parks and Los Angeles Airport. Active duty, retired military, and civil service person-

Oct. 26-29 Laughlin, \$89 sharing, \$135 single

Nov. 13-15 Palm Springs Follies, \$245/\$370

Nov. 20-23 San Francisco, \$240/\$370

Nov. 21 TV taping, Stan Hooper, \$42

Dec. 1-4 Las Vegas Lights, \$120/\$170

Dec. 10-15 Sedona Holiday, \$397/\$497

Dec. 18 The Producers, \$110

Jan. 1 Rose Parade, \$110

nel, government contractors, families, and guests are eligible to participate. The address is P.O. Box 5459, Vandenberg AFB, CA 93437-0459. You might also visit their website at <http://www.30svs.com/index2.html>. Click on Downloads and then Upcoming Tours. For complete information on the following upcoming trips, contact the tour office at (805) 606-7976.

Jan. 18-21 Laughlin Flamingo, \$85

Feb. 7 Riverdance, \$82

Feb. 13-16 Lake Tahoe Holiday, \$179/\$199

Mar. 5-7 Death Valley, \$198

Apr. 21-29 Costa Rica, \$1,895

May 20-27 Mid-Atlantic Capitols/Seaports, 1,649

July 25- Aug. 4 Alaska Cruise, price to be determined

VA Community Based Clinic directory listed

The Department of Veterans Affairs' Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System sponsors community based clinics to provide service for retirees eligible for VA health benefits.

Lompoc Community Based Clinic

1111 East Ocean Ave., Suite 8

Lompoc, CA 93436

Don Casebolt, NP; Clinical Manager

Phone: (805) 736-7767

Fax: (805) 736-8637

Outpatient Clinic

Suemantha Johnson

(805) 736-7767

San Luis Obispo Community Based Clinic

1288 Morro Street, Ste.200

San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

Phone: (805) 546-1233

Fax: (805) 547-1179

Outpatient Clinic

Wilma Mechsner

(805) 546-1830

Santa Barbara Community Based Clinic

4440 Calle Real

Santa Barbara, CA 93110

Phone: (805) 683-1491

Outpatient Clinic

Mary Hershey

(805) 683-1491

Dental Services

Lori Walker, DDS

(818) 891-7711 Ext. 9612

Compensation & Pension Exams

Barbara Burns

(310) 478-3711 Ext. 40072

Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation

Hannah A Nishimoto

(310) 478-3711 Ext 48313

Speech & Audiology

Douglas Noffsinger

(310) 478-3711 Ext. 40624

Spinal Cord Injury

Michael Evans

(818) 891-7711 Ext. 9656

Women's Clinic

Joyce Holcomb

(818) 895-9555

Ceremonial Bugle Approved

By Cmdr. Earl Gustafson USN (Ret.)

Retiree Times Editor

The Department of Defense has announced approval of the use of the ceremonial bugle as an alternative to the recorded version of Taps played on a stereo compact disc player at military funerals.

The ceremonial bugle is a small cone-shaped electronic device inserted deep into the bell of a bugle that plays an exceptionally high-quality rendition of Taps that is virtually indistinguishable from a live bugler. The ceremonial bugle will be offered to families as an alternative to the pre-recorded Taps played on a compact disc player, but will not be used as a substitute for a live bugler when one is available. Live buglers will continue to play at veterans' funerals whenever available.

"In addition to the very high quality sound, it provides a dignified 'visual' of a bugler playing Taps, something families tell us they want," said John M. Molino, a deputy assistant secretary of defense. With the bugler shortage in mind, Congress passed a law that took effect in January 2000 allowing a recorded version of Taps using audio equipment if a live horn player is not available. Molino said the push-button bugle is a "dignified alternative" to prerecorded Taps played on a compact disc player.

During its 6-month test period in the state of Missouri, ceremonial bugles were played at over 1,000 funerals and received overwhelming positive re-

views from funeral directors, military and veteran service organization personnel providing military funeral honors and most importantly, from family members themselves. In every instance, when an actual bugler was not available, family members were given the choice of using a CD player to play Taps or using the ceremonial bugle. Family members chose the ceremonial bugle, and were very pleased with it.

"The test of the ceremonial bugle was outstanding and the acceptance by the families was tremendous," said retired Col. Wayne Medley, director of the Missouri National Guard's Funeral Honors Program. "The families thought this was a much better and more professional means of sounding 'Taps' as opposed to a CD," Medley added.

The ceremonial bugle is available from S & D Consulting Int., Ltd., P.O. Box 193, 1636 3rd Ave., New York, NY 10128. The phone number is (212) 426-3268. Office Hours 9am - 4pm Eastern Time Monday through Friday. The ceremonial bugle retails for \$525.

The DoD provides military funeral honors to thousands of veterans' families each year. The ceremonial bugle is intended to enhance the dignity of military funeral honors. These honors demonstrate the nation's deep gratitude to those who, in times of war and peace, have honorably served their country. The ceremonial paying of respect is a final tribute to their service. *Compiled from Web sites*



Photo by Ron Holbrook

At the September potluck



RAO Photo by John McGraw

More than 30 people participate in the September potluck.

DFAS advises caution when using "myPay"

AIR FORCE RETIREE NEWS—Officials here caution all users of "myPay" to use only the official Web site when accessing pay account information. "Personal information is valuable and should be safeguarded," said Claudia Bogard, director of corporate communications for the Defense Finance and Accounting Service.

Look-alike sites have recently frustrated myPay customers who have been confused by accidentally finding their way to a commercial site that is in no way affiliated with DFAS or the Department of Defense.

The DFAS-operated Web site is a secure Web site that lets active-duty, National Guard and Reserve service members, civilian employees, and military retirees and annuitants take charge of their pay accounts online.

The DFAS myPay Web site is found at <https://mypay.dfas.mil/>.

VA Increases Payments to Medal of Honor Recipients

WASHINGTON - Monthly federal payments to 136 living recipients of the Medal of Honor are rising 67 percent this month. Since at least World War I, the federal government's agency for veterans — the Department of Veterans Affairs — has paid a monthly stipend to holders of the military's highest decoration for combat valor. Under the new rates, the payments will rise from \$600 monthly to \$1,000 monthly.

The increase was authorized by the Veterans Benefits Act of 2002 which also set up a formula for future increases in the Medal of Honor stipend based on the annual rate of inflation. Previously, each increase in the Medal of Honor stipend required a spe-

cific act of Congress. The rate went from \$10 in 1916 to \$100 in 1961, \$200 in 1979, \$400 in 1993 and \$600 in 1998.

The new law also provides for a retroactive payment of stipends to cover the period between the act of valor and the awarding of the Medal of Honor. For those previously non-covered months or years, the payment will be based on the rate in effect at the time of the act of valor.

Adjustment checks covering the month of September and any retroactive payments due will be released to Medal of Honor recipients this month. The new rate will be reflected in regular monthly payments starting Nov. 1.

Little known TRICARE facts

As a retiring reserve member, at age 60 — usually the same time that you become eligible to receive retired or retainer pay — you and your eligible family members become eligible for military health care benefits.

In cases where a health care service is not covered by Medicare but is covered by TRICARE For Life, TFL will become the primary payer for that service. In all cases, TFL will pay only for services that are covered by TRICARE, and payment will be up to the allowable charge for that service. Beneficiaries will be responsible for the TRICARE Standard fiscal year deductible and cost shares.

National POW/MIA Recognition Day



RAO Photo by John McGraw

Col. Frank Gallegos, 30th Space Wing commander, speaks with Air Force retiree Dick Barkely and Army retiree Vernon Siebert at Vandenberg AFB's annual observance of National POW/MIA Recognition Day Sept. 19, 2003.

Society of Military Widows

The SMW, Central Coast Chapter 44, meets the second Wednesday of each month in the Retiree Activities Center. The ladies have a **business meeting** that begins at **1 p.m.**; usually, followed by a **guest speaker at 2 p.m.** Retirees and spouses frequently attend the informative lecture sessions. **Military widows, retirees and spouses are invited.**

DEERS verification changes for unremarried former spouses

AIR FORCE RETIREE NEWS—The Social Security number used to verify TRICARE eligibility in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System for unremarried former spouses is changing. This change does not affect unremarried widows or widowers.

Starting Oct. 1, 2003, DEERS reflected TRICARE eligibility for these beneficiaries using the unremarried former spouse's own SSN and not the former sponsor's. Health care information will be filed under the unremarried former spouse's own SSN and name. These beneficiaries will now use their own name and SSN to schedule medical appointments and to file TRICARE claims.

The current Uniformed Services Identification and Privilege Card, DD Form 1173, held by the Unremarried former spouse is still valid until it expires. Upon renewal, the unremarried former spouse will be is-

sued a replacement Department of Defense/Uniformed Services Identification and Privilege Card, DD Form 2765. The Defense Manpower Data Center Support Office is sending a letter to all beneficiaries affected by this change. The letter explains the new DEERS eligibility verification procedures and serves as official notification from DoD regarding this change. The letter does not, however, provide proof of continued eligibility for TRICARE health care benefits. Unremarried former spouses may contact or visit the nearest identification card issuing facility for questions or assistance. Unremarried former spouses should always keep their DEERS information current and up-to-date. For questions regarding their medical records, they should contact the military treatment facility and medical records department where their DoD medical records are stored.

Enrollment fee killed for VA priority 8s

The House has rejected an administration proposal for the Department of Veterans Affairs to charge a \$250 annual enrollment fee for veterans in Priority Group 8. The proposal also would have more than doubled prescription co-pays for Priority 8 veterans, from \$7 to \$15.

Although the VA suspended new enrollments in Priority 8 earlier this year, veterans already enrolled continue to be eligible for treatment, and would have incurred the new payments. Priority 8s are veterans with no service-connected disabilities who have higher incomes than geographically determined means test levels.

CRSC processing slow at AFPC

AIR FORCE RETIREE NEWS—Insufficient documentation continues to slow the Combat Related Special Compensation review process in the Air Force Personnel Center. Physical Disability Division officials report that they are still working on the applications received June 16-20.

They noted that more than 200 cases have been found not to have sufficient documentation. This requires the staff to request the members medical records to search for documentation. It's taking two to three months to get the records.

During the week ending Oct. 3, the division received 202 applications. That same week, the staff approved 30 applications and disapproved 34. So far, a total of 7,334 applications have been reviewed with 641 approved and 639 disapproved.

Rather than contacting the Physical Disability Division staff directly, anyone needing more information should call the Air Force Contact Center toll free at (866) 229-7074, commercial (210) 565-5000.

JROTC seeks retiree applicants

AIR FORCE RETIREE NEWS SERVICE—The Air Force needs more military retirees to take on teaching roles in high school classrooms as the service expands its Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps program.

The scope of the program that includes 744 JROTC units in high schools worldwide means lots of opportunity for qualified, eligible applicants, said Jo Alice Talley, JROTC instructor management chief. "We have been approved to add an additional 201 units by fiscal year 2007. The expansion provides increased opportunities for rewarding community service positions for retired Air Force members interested in becoming high school teachers."

Applicants are encouraged to apply for the many vacancies for the upcoming school year. The Air Force JROTC Web site, www.afoats.af.mil lists current vacancies and provides applications.

Air Force officer or enlisted members who retired from active duty within the past five years or less

and who served at least 20 years or who retired under the Temporary Early Retirement Authority with at least 15 years of active duty service may apply, Ms. Talley said.

Active duty members may apply when they are within six months of their retirement date. In some instances, the five-year date of retirement can be waived for up to 10 years. Waiver consideration is based on the needs of the program and applicant qualifications.

Instructors wear uniforms, meet current weight requirements and receive, as a minimum, a salary equal to the difference between their retired pay and their active-duty pay and allowances, excluding incentive pay that they would receive if on active duty.

For more information, call the AFJROTC Division toll free at (866) 235-7682 extension 35275/35300, or write to: HQ AFOATS/JRI, 551 E. Maxwell Blvd., Maxwell AFB, AL 36112-6106.

VA reduces claims backlog

WASHINGTON—Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony Principi today declared partial victory in the Bush administration's battle to reduce the backlog of veterans' compensation claims. On Sept. 30, the Secretary made good on his pledge when the Department of Veterans Affairs pending inventory dropped to 253,000 claims, representing a 41 percent reduction in inventory from a high of 432,000.

A cornerstone of Principi's pledge to the nation in 2001 was to reduce the pending claims workload in VA to 250,000 rating claims by Sept. 30, 2003. This number represents a normal workload inventory because of the complex process involved in gathering all the information and

evidence needed to decide a veteran's claim.

The VA has decided about 68,000 claims per month over the past two years, an increase of more than 70 percent from the 2001 level of about 40,000 per month. It is also significant to note that the average age of the claims in VA's inventory has been reduced from over 200 days to 111 days.

"In February 2002, it took an average of 233 days, or more than seven months, to adjudicate a new disability claim. Although we have reduced that average to 156 days, I hope that in the months ahead we'll be able to announce we are at 100 days, giving veterans the service they deserve," Principi said.

TRICARE fast facts

All of the TRICARE programs provide coverage for medically necessary ambulance services from an accident site or home to a hospital, or between hospitals. This includes air ambulances when travel by ground ambulance is either not available or feasible, or the distance is too great for the circumstances or the move requires more rapid transport because of the patient's condition, than ground transport can support. Ambulance transport that is for patient convenience such as to transport to patient appointments, etc., is not covered.

Commissaries nix home-printed coupons

AIR FORCE RETIREE NEWS SERVICE

— Commissaries are no longer accepting “home-printed” coupons as the grocery industry comes to terms with the fraudulent use of Internet coupons.

“We still gladly accept manufacturers coupons - the kind you clip out of newspapers or magazines or that you receive in the mail. What we’re not accepting are coupons that have been downloaded from the Internet and printed with a home computer because it’s too difficult for our cashiers to tell if they are valid,” said Bob Vitikacs, the Defense Commissary Agency’s director of operations and product support.

The use of fraudulent Internet coupons is growing in the grocery business and many commer-

cial grocers are also declining to accept home-printed coupons. Most coupons are legitimate, but home computers and Internet access have made it easy to alter legitimate coupons for fraudulent use, Vitikacs said.

Some analysts estimate the loss by coupon fraud to the grocery industry to be millions of dollars. Fraud ultimately costs consumers as manufacturers raise their prices to recoup losses. To protect against loss, DeCA officials decided to immediately suspend acceptance of home-printed, photocopied or facsimile-generated coupons - color and black-and-white. “This is an interim measure we’ve adopted immediately to protect our customers and industry partners,” Vitikacs said.

Little known TRICARE facts

Dependent parents and parents-in-law are not eligible for TRICARE benefits. However, they are eligible for care in military treatment facilities, on a space-available basis (and if available, TRICARE Plus), and may be eligible for TRICARE Senior Pharmacy benefits.

When you become eligible for the TRICARE For Life benefit, your TRICARE pharmacy benefits also continue without any disruption or changes with the exception of the name of the benefit which changes to TRICARE Senior Pharmacy.

The term CHAMPUS (Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Uniformed Services) Program was replaced by the term TRICARE. TRICARE stands for the triple option that is available: TRICARE Prime, TRICARE Extra and TRICARE Standard.

Shoe inserts (a type of orthotic, that is not considered a brace and is not attached to the shoe) is not a covered benefit.

TRICARE does provide coverage, as long as the clinical requirements are met, for surgery for morbid obesity.

Service Organization Directory

Air Force Sergeants Association

2nd Tuesday of each month at 3:30 p.m., Vandenberg Services Center, Tech.Sgt. Scott Astrosky (805) 606-9308, scott.astrosky@vandenberg.af.mil

Military Officers Association of America

Santa Maria-Lompoc Chapter

Call for location and time, Dick Jones (805) 733-1819, jamjones@impulse.net

Central Calif. Coast Chapter -- San Luis Obispo

2nd weekend of each month, call for location and time, Fred Tama (805) 481-7500, e.tama@att.net

Santa Barbara Chapter

2nd Tuesday of each month, Harry’s Café, call for time, Steve Keller, (805) 965-0359, keller103@cox.net

Society of Military Widows

Central Coast Chapter 44

2nd Wednesday of each month at 1 p.m., Vandenberg Retiree Activities Office, Juanita Anderson, (805) 937-0940, spartlerjia@aol.com

Don’t forget Retiree Appreciation Day
Saturday, Nov. 15
at the Pacific Coast Club

